Social Intelligence[1]

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Most of human suffering and grief has been the product of social evils, not of individual wrong doing. Good men, not bad ones, have caused the greater part of our troubles. The great injustices and disasters of the past have come not through the planning of those with evil purposes, but through conditions sanctioned and supported by men of the best intentions. Stupidity is the greatest of crimes.

History sustains the charge. Up the grooves of the centuries, mankind has toiled under the burdens of useless wars, unnecessary poverty, and blind intolerance and tyranny. With the mistaken idea of preserving vital social forms, conservative groups have held back change until the madness of revolution has taken its awful toll. Pious men have confused their own opinions and interests with those of God and the ages, while darkness has covered the face of the earth. In spite of matchless material advances in our own day, social progress has been paltry. The very skill of our hands threatens our civilization because the head and heart have not kept pace. We have learned to produce magnificently; we have not been able to distribute intelligently the things we have made. We have unraveled the mysteries of the material universe; we have not been able to establish social justice. Regardless of abstract opinions, the fact remains that wars can be opposed only by the disloyal, the blind, and the impractical dreamer. The emotional outbursts of orthodox patriotism stifle protests and turn precipitous action into a holy crusade. And good men go on crusades. The sacred rights of private property and the equally sacred freedom of the individual in affairs economic are sufficient excuse for permitting poverty to go on and to make it into a sort of affliction visited on man by the Gods. The appeal *for* social stability and *to* the traditions of the past are generally sufficient to discredit the social innovator and to rob him of respectability. Who can stand against the cry of "Revolutionist?"

And all of this not for lack of human capacity. We have had our wise men and our saints in abundance. The trouble lies deeper. About things social, we have substituted emotion for thought. Speculation and experimentation are largely forbidden. Around each unit in the social pattern clusters a whole series of passion-stirring words which hide realities and prevent the discernment of our own bests interests. This is American; that is un-American. This is radical or communistic; that is according to the fathers. The basic facts of interest conflict, and the necessity for rational planning to maintain balance, are lost. And so we stumble forward from disaster to disaster while the philosopher gravely asks whether civilization can endure—whether men can long inherit the earth.

A Rational Social Order

The real difficulties in securing a rational social order arise from the fact that "in every civilized society," as the wise old James Madison put it, "there are economic groups, according to different degrees and kinds of property." The game of politics, under such conditions, becomes one of balancing the claims of conflicting groups according to necessity or expediency. The party or government which is able to satisfy its most powerful constituents endures and, in time, creates the fiction of political forms with absolute and intrinsic values. Then every sanction from tradition to divinity is called in to defend that which is, and those who prosper under its reign become the patriots of the day through loyalty to its patterns. Only revolution can change the course, and revolutions prove to be, not what Thomas Jefferson thought them, but, the worst of evils. In either case, rational planning is out of the question, and social progress is a matter of chance.

In American life two conflicting ideals have always existed. To these the basic interest groups have turned for emotional support and rational justification. They center about the words *Liberty* and *Equality* as found in the Declaration of Independence. They are the bitterest of enemies, but, under unique American development, until of late, they have dwelt so harmoniously together that few have discerned their inherent antagonism. Yet he who runs might easily read that if men are free they will not remain equal, and if they are kept equal, it will be at the expense of their freedom. Today that fact is slowly dawning on the muddled minds of Americans who have accepted the traditional unity of their faith. We are painfully learning that the great purposes of a democratic society are not so simple when maturity comes.

Just what the Fathers meant when they talked

of liberty and equality, few know and fewer care. Sufficient to say that in the years since, freedom has been our *practice* and equality our *boast*. The term "liberty" has come to mean that government shall keep its hands out of business and wherever the individual may function, it is his American right to do so without restraint. All that the term *laissez faire* implies in things economic has become its possession. It has sanctioned competition among individuals as the best means to efficiency and fair prices. It has been the basis of the right claimed to possess and exploit the natural resources of the earth's richest continent. It has spread the halo of righteousness over an economic system motivated by private acquisition of wealth and production carried on primarily for profits. In fact, it has become the buttress of the whole capitalistic system of our day and made its continuance a matter of intense American emotional interest.

In the realm of thought, freedom has gradually been extended to those who have attempted to encompass the facts and theories of material things. The work of the physical scientist not only has become respectable, it has been glorified quite beyond its merits. The scientist has been permitted to speculate and experiment, and what he has found has been hailed as discovery of the greatest interest and benefit to mankind, even though his successors prove it all to have been false. The returns of freedom applied to scientific scholarship have paid dividends large enough to justify occasional losses in blind allays. Mistakes are the price we pay for progress.

The term "equality" has not fared so well. Regardless of original meanings, in practice, it has insisted on a fair opportunity for the pursuit of happiness in such varied ways as public education and the distribution of free homesteads for settlers. In a less definite way, it has become the weapon of those who have not shared in the blessings of capitalistic expansion and who, at intervals, have arisen to proclaim the Americanism of "well-being." Its mission generally has been that of protest; its devotees include a long list of "harebrains" who have borne such epithets as "loco focos," "greenbackers," "populists," and "brain-trusters." It has harbored such unrespectables as Thomas Jefferson, David A. Wells, James B. Weaver, Eugene Debs, and William Jennings Bryan—to say nothing of the latest crop of dreamers down in Washington. It has seldom been dominant, and as seldom in the favor of substantial citizens. The fight to think and experiment in the field of the social sciences, whose business it is to secure a working equality, has not yet even been started.

And America's preference has seemingly proven wise. Under the banners of *freedom*, a race of pioneers has crossed a continent and transformed it from wilderness simplicity to industrial complexity. The story of technical advances in the multiplication of machines and horse-power to turn them reads like a fairy tale. The making of goods and the development of agents and means to distribute them have enabled common men the western world over to live like ancient kings. Wealth has piled high and rich men have endowed the institutions of learning and culture. The city has brought to high development the possibilities in group association for improved living. Freedom applied in political-economic ways has wrought a new epoch in the history of mankind.

The rôle played by woman in this drama was not a minor one. On the frontier, as Dr. Paxson so beautifully says, "she bore the children and buried a staggering number of them. . . . She fed her men and raised her brood, cooked their food and laid it by for the winter. She was at once butcher, packer, and baker. The family clothes showed her craftsmanship. . . . When one adds to the grinding and unavoidable labor, the anguish that came from sickness and danger, the frontier woman, who survived, became an heroic figure and the children who felt her touch became the proper material from which to choose the heroes of a nation." When the factory came, woman took her place at the spindle and the loom to lay the foundations for a new order. Women, not men, ushered in the Industrial Revolution at Lowell and Lawrence and Fall River. In the creation of a business organization to make possible the workings of mass production and complex interdependence, she also did her part. The typewriter became almost a monopoly in her keeping, and the private secretary became the medium through which a business system maintained its course, while men folk were distracted by the worries of golf scores and pressure salesmanship. To women fell largely the task of administering to the human wreckage which the grinding pressure of competition and the hurry of urban living produced. The angel of mercy, the helpmate of distraction. Freedom had broken the bondage of the centuries and piled new responsibilities upon feminine shoulders grown broad enough to bear them.

But there was another side to the picture of developments under freedom. The Fathers proved their wisdom in balancing their ideals. Industrial development, under freedom, was basically aristocratic, steadily favoring the few and concentrating power into their hands. The corporation, toward which efficient business tended, crowded out the lesser folk and mocked the governments which tried to control its ways. By January 1, 1930, seventy-

eight per cent of American business wealth, not including banking, was corporate wealth. The two hundred largest corporations controlled about forty-nine per cent of all this corporate wealth, and thirty-eight per cent of all our business wealth. And in these two hundred corporations, only six per cent of the wealth was controlled by those owning one-half or more of the stock. That, my friends, constitutes collectivism, whether you call it by the name or not!

And every technical advance displaced human hands with machines. Some were soon absorbed by new industries created by the same process, but unemployment of industrial workers became a permanent part of American life. Today some twelve million men are out of work, and authorities have stated that full production can be resumed without the return of a single one of these workers. Furthermore, we could dispense with one-half of the farmers of the nation and drop at least one-third of our present acreage from production, and still produce, by new methods, more food than we can consume or find a market for outside our borders. These are serious facts in a system where a market is necessary to keep production going and where employment is necessary to make a market. A vicious circle so delicately balanced that failure at any one point plunges us into a depression and impending ruin.

But that is not all. The city, where by 1920 the majority of the people of the United States lived, was a part of that matchless development. There was to be found most of the new wealth and luxury, most of the culture and most of the leisure. But the great cities were places where the old American democracy could not live, where the problems presented were those for technical experts, not plain average citizens inducted into office. Only corruption and inefficiency could result from a continuation of all in government which the traditions of freedom required. The shame of the city, as Brand Whitlock called it, was the result.

And the final product of it all was an extravagant, gambling life, where excitement took the place of happiness; action the place of thought. The values placed on men were in terms of wealth and industrial power. Goodness was confused with bigness, show with taste, extravagance with refinement. The critic coined the term "gilded age" to describe its quality. We had reached maturity without acquiring discipline or discrimination—the essence of culture.

It took the excesses of the 1920's and the collapse of the 1930's to reveal the full weakness of a social-economic order based on freedom untempered by equality. Suddenly we found ourselves in the absurd positions of having more goods than we could use and men starving and freezing for the want of those very goods, of machines which mocked the old curse of toil, and made leisure a possibility for all, yet yielding us only unemployment for those who had to work to live. We talked of men out of work because production had ceased because men were out of work and could not buy. We had solved the problems of production, but we had yet to learn the first lessons in a wise distribution. The business genius, to whom we had ascribed all wisdom, proved to be only a gambler with great forces he neither created nor controlled. Overnight our Insulls, Mitchells, and Morgans passed from dominance to public condemnation for doing the very things they had been considered masters and benefactors in doing for decades. The values evolved under the ideal of freedom needed sharp recasting in a period when production was no longer the problem, and distribution had come to vex the minds of carefree Americans.

In other words, what had happened, as I said in speaking to you on a former occasion, was an ethical collapse as well as an economic one. Old ideals and values had collapsed with the system they had supported. The hour had struck when men must reassess the worth of their whole social-economic code. The old task of fighting through a screen of emotionalized words to find realities had to be undertaken by those with the courage and the heart to go ahead. The pioneer conditions under which freedom had developed and rendered its magnificent services were ended. Before us lay what William Allen White called "the most elaborate metallic scrap heap that the history of civilization has recorded." Social salvation depended on the building of a new equality which free men had not been able to secure. A day of forced coöperation or social planning was at hand or complete disaster lay just ahead.

The average man still believes that "a little repairing, a little patching, a little good will, a better understanding of the other fellow's point of view, and steel will again sell at 150." And that is all that we need and all that we want. But youth knows better. You are facing a world which will not welcome you with open arms. Hundreds of thousands like you will find no place in which to serve next year or the next. My mail, this year, has been filled with pleas from splendidly educated boys and girls who merely want the chance to earn their bread and butter. They are willing to take even menial tasks. One doctor of philosophy is a floor walker in a department store; another is running an elevator in an apartment building; a third is washing dishes in a kitchen. Three years of bitter struggle to make use of graduate study in their chosen fields has taught them that produc-

tion in the future must be for use and not alone for profits. They have become convinced that a wholesome, yet assured, simplicity for the many is better than a destroying extravagance for the few. They know that the taste for finer things is preferable to the opportunities for garish indulgence. They are certain that there is nothing sacred or peculiarly American about the practices which have made business into gambling and made possible the absurdities of want amid plenty, grinding toil amid a welter of machines. They will insist that equality in its fullest meaning of a decent chance to be born well, to express one's personality completely, and to be rid of the plaguing worry of want, were basic purposes in the founding of the Republic. The terms "un-American," "radical," or even "revolutionist," unfairly hurled at those who follow Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Abraham Lincoln will not bother them. They will be moved by currents of thought, not those of emotion.

I might wish also that they would be done with politics as we have known it. A planned society cannot come by merely granting conflicting groups enough to keep them politically quiet. When will we learn, as Professor Taylor of Harvard says, "that economic realism requires us to see political justice to all groups in terms not of equally generous concessions to all, but in equal resistance to all such demands." We need brains in government, not bargains. The state must serve a wider purpose in the days ahead, and it must do so without the loss of more of freedom than a democracy can yield. We do not want to secure well-being through dictatorships, but we want it through the votes of happy men freely given for a just program. A new Equality will restore Freedom.

The call is for a social intelligence which begins with the knowledge that man has made this entire social structure—its institutions and its values as well—according to the purposes of interest groups, and not according to any God-given plan. There is not a sacred thing in it. Age may prove good service rendered; it does not insure continued service. Nor does mere newness guarantee soundness. There is no inherent value in either holding fast or in making changes. The only test is in the widest well-being offered to men. That intelligence proceeds to sophistication with a thorough understanding of the part which emotion, shaped into subtle propaganda, plays in giving respectability, legality, and divinity to existing forms and ruling groups. It reaches maturity in the growth of mind and heart to the point where the good of humanity rises above selfish gains, long-time values stand above those of the immediate, and love of beauty transcends the accumulation of material things. The hands by their skill must not be permitted to destroy us.

My last suggestion of heart and beauty needs more emphasis. I have performed only half my mission when I recount the wonders of human building and urged the clearing of the air so that intelligence may save us from ruin. It is not enough to be wise. It is necessary also that we be good. Separated from every creed and dogma of human creation, the fact still remains that you must love your neighbor as yourself, if a social order is to live and progress. Men must practice honesty, tolerance, and loyalty; simplicity and wholesome happiness must be ends in themselves if a better way of life is to be found. Whether we like it or not, a better world begins within the human heart.

And woman has ever exerted a wider influence in things ethical and esthetic than in any others. Today her responsibilities do not differ from those of her brother in social matters. Women sit in the councils at Washington; they are by the side of the bandit as well. But their influence in setting values to show a nation what is worth the while is unique in degree. The cultivation of the heart to balance the mind and hand is her opportunity.

Today, as graduates of an American college, you assume the responsibilities of social intelligence. You must be skilled enough to perform well the everyday tasks of living and living better; you must be wise enough to build a saner world than this broken mess we cast at your feet; you must be good enough to want justice done to all men. Then you may inherit the earth.

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[1] A Commencement Address delivered before the Senior Class of Scripps College, Claremont, California, June 15, 1934.

Wickham Steed is concerned over "The Future of Warfare" (August *Nineteenth Century*). The only way to avert conflicts is by some potent international organization against war of any and every kind; this involves the renunciation of neutrality by all governments. International conferences have accomplished little because they do not come under the one overriding principle in the name of which the world can be effectively organized against war and for peace.

The critical nature of the approaching League Assembly meeting is indicated by F. R. Hely-Hutchinson in the August *Empire Review*.